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ABSTRACT

This brief paper focuses on the need to widen the definition of "gifted and talented" so that it encompasses a wider pool of talent, and to redesign vocational-technical education programs. It discusses the various different definitions of giftedness and the necessity of rewriting the definition so that it encompasses a wider pool of talent. The wider definition would include technically gifted students and other students suitable for trade-academic programs. The need to redesign current U.S. secondary vocational-technical education programs along the lines of the German model, in which corporations support and fund special schools, is addressed. Education-business partnerships are urged to help equip schools with the latest technical equipment to facilitate the preparation of students for the jobs of tomorrow. The paper concludes by stating the need for experimental and survey research to help steer the actions of forward thinking curriculum planners. (CR)

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Running head: TRADE-ACADEMIC EDUCATION

A Proposal for Evaluation of U. S. Trade-Academic Education Based on a Wide Definition of Gifted and Talented

Article for Submission to ERIC

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A Proposal for Evaluation of U. S. Trade-Academic Education Based on a Wide Definition of Gifted and Talented

Introduction

In a recent synthesis Barbara Clark (1991) conceived of dividing giftedness in a new way. Drawing in part upon a number of existing sources, she devised the "Universe of Intelligence," and pointed out that it was based on new physiological knowledge about how the brain works. Here are her four main Universe divisions and their subdivisions:

Physical:	Sensing, Movement
Cognitive:	Spatial, Linear
Intuitive:	Rational, Predictive, Transformational
Affective:	Emotional, Social

Definitions of Giftedness

The reader will possibly recognize some familiar connections in Barbara Clark's schema. For example, consider the popular conceptions of Howard Gardner (1983), who captured quite fully the wide-ranging nature of extraordinary talent. Gardner named these talent areas the "intelligences": linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, body-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.

The most widely accepted theory is Renzulli's (1978). He outlined four areas of gifted behavior: above average ability,

creativity, task commitment, and creative production.

The earliest of these outlines was that of Terman (1925), in which intelligence was the sole measure of giftedness. One of the latest is that of the U. S. Congress. Public Law 97-35 (1981) defined giftedness as comprising "high performance capability" in various academic fields, plus the areas of intellectual prowess, creativity, leadership, and art.

A Proposal

This article proposes that it is possible to rewrite the definition of gifted and talented so that it encompasses a wider pool of talent. Such a wider definition could serve as a powerful tool in re-energizing secondary education in the United States. I suggest that we could enrich our country by recognizing the value of every student's talent--not by continuing to focus almost exclusively on purely academic abilities and achievements. Our society has had to pay for missing previous opportunities to better train our workers.

Wider Definition

There should be a re-evaluation of U. S. trade-academic education, based on a wider definition of Gifted and Talented. That is, Gifted and Talented should include the technically gifted student, and other students, all especially suitable for what I call trade-academic education programs.

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The German Model

In order to change the present pattern, I propose updating all current U. S. secondary vocational-technical education by instituting trade-academic education programs beginning in the middle school, along the lines of the German model (Smith 1995). In this model corporations support and fund special schools. Companies have a hand in determining the curricula guiding the education of their future workers. Academic subjects are required.

Students compete to enter German trade schools, and are motivated to remain in good standing. Daimler-Benz is a particularly good example of the success of this kind of a program. Students there have reported that they recognize the system to be their best ticket to a good-paying, respected position in the sponsoring company. (Smith 1995)

Additional Comments

I propose a new era of education-business partnerships. Much effort is needed to lay the groundwork. We can recruit school districts, governments, corporations, and other community institutions to help accomplish the goals. With the help of companies, who need today's students to be prepared for the jobs of tomorrow, we can equip the schools with the latest technical equipment to facilitate that preparation. A number of pioneering U. S. school districts are already involved (Smith 1995) in trade

education partnerships with corporations.

Conclusions

This article introduces only a brief, preliminary outline. We now should perform new experimental and survey research--perhaps beginning in those very pioneering school districts--and use the research to help steer the actions of forward-thinking curriculum planners.

A modest amount of early, real success could serve to raise the level of public interest. As in most great projects, progress can be made if a solid foundation is laid. Part of this solid foundation is a needs analysis. The need for language training programs should also be assessed (Mead, 1990), to go hand in hand with any other educational content areas.

I mentioned above the costs of delay: The economists would call these opportunity costs, the cost of passing by an opportunity for educational advancement and greater use of our nation's human talents.

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